



## **Report to the Legislature**

### **Foster Parent Retention and Stability of Foster Placements**

Chapter 7, Laws of 2001, E2, Section 202(6)

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This report is provided in accordance with the 2001 budget proviso requiring the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to report quarterly to the Legislature “progress against appropriate baseline measures for foster parent retention and stability of foster placements.” This report is for the period ending December 31, 2002.

*The Building a Future for Washington’s Children: Foster Care Improvement Plan* is a major component of the *Kids Come First Action Agenda*. This collaborative effort between the DSHS Children’s Administration (CA) and Casey Family Programs was published in May 2001 and was designed to develop long-term solutions to the challenges facing the foster care system. Key foster care and child welfare workers from throughout Washington State spent many hours working to create this framework to improve the retention of foster parents.

The retention of skilled and experienced foster parents is crucial in meeting the needs of vulnerable children placed in the child welfare system. When sufficient homes are available, children can be placed with families who are better equipped to provide for their unique needs. This, in turn, is likely to improve the stability of the children’s placements during the time they must remain in foster care away from their own families. These key outcomes of increased stability for children and increased retention of foster parents continue to be important strategic focuses of CA.

The information presented in this report begins with baseline data as of June 30, 2001, includes an annual update for fiscal year 2002, and presents quarterly data for the first quarter of fiscal year 2003.

### **RETENTION OF FOSTER HOMES**

The Children’s Administration has been measuring foster home retention based on the net increase or decrease in the total number of licensed foster homes. CA recognizes that both the retention of currently licensed homes and the recruitment and licensure of new homes impact the total number of licensed foster homes; therefore, the current measure is, at best, a proxy of retention. The administration is exploring the issues around a possible new method to measure retention by measuring the rate foster parents leave the system and the reasons they leave.

### Number of Licensed Foster Homes

Retention	June 30, 2001 Homes	June 30, 2002 Homes	September 30, 2002 Homes	Percent Change in Available Homes (6/01-9/02)
Statewide	6,209	6,326	6,353	2.3 %
Region 1	844	869	856	1.4 %
Region 2	741	777	800	8.0 %
Region 3	887	913	915	3.2 %
Region 4	1,190	1,221	1,224	2.9 %
Region 5	1,190	1,191	1,205	1.3 %
Region 6	1,357	1,355	1,353	(0.3 %)

It is a priority of CA to increase the number of foster homes available to care for children and to improve the accuracy of foster home records. Overall, the data in the chart above demonstrate a steady increase in the number of homes since June 2001 when CA began reporting on the number of licensed foster homes. The increase of eight percent in Region 2 over a fifteen-month period is particularly noteworthy.

### STABILITY OF PLACEMENTS

The Children's Administration measures stability of placements using the federal measure of "the percent of children with no more than two placements during the first 12 months in care." The number of children in stable placements showed an upward trend in most regions and the state between FY 2001 and FY 2002, as indicated in the chart below. The first quarter of fiscal year 2003 shows a slight decrease in the percent of children with two or fewer placements. This decrease is believed to be primarily the result of the calculation method, which is not well suited to a comparison of annual and quarterly data as is required here, but does bear watching over the rest of the fiscal year.

### Percent of Children with No More than Two Placements during First Twelve Months in Care

Stability of Placements	Fiscal Year 2001	Fiscal Year 2002	Percent Change FY01 to FY02	Fiscal Year 2003 Quarter 1
Statewide	81.1 %	85.5 %	4.4	81.7 %
Region 1	86.9 %	91.0 %	4.1	88.0 %
Region 2	79.4 %	82.0 %	2.6	79.6 %
Region 3	76.9 %	76.0 %	(.9)	74.2 %
Region 4	78.6 %	84.5 %	5.9	80.0 %
Region 5	81.8 %	88.1 %	6.3	82.1 %
Region 6	82.4 %	87.8 %	5.4	85.0 %

## **WORK IN PROGRESS**

### **Foster Care Improvement Plan**

The role of Casey Family Programs in collaboration with CA on the Foster Care Improvement Plan (FCIP) will be changing due to changes within the Casey Family Programs agency. Casey Family Programs will continue to be involved in the plan, with a focus on continuing the kinship project begun in Region 4. Members of the FCIP also will continue to work with Casey in the Breakthrough Series Collaborative. A meeting will be held early in 2003 to restructure CA's partnership roles with Casey. The work of the FCIP will continue.

The goals remain to improve the recruitment and retention of foster parents; improve the relationship between foster parents and CA; better measure satisfaction of the foster parents; and communicate more effectively with foster parents.

### **Breakthrough Series Collaborative**

The Breakthrough Series Collaborative is a nationwide effort with two dozen teams sharing and testing ideas about improved ways to recruit and retain foster parents. The Washington team is headed by CA Assistant Secretary Rosalyn Oreskovich. The goal is to identify ideas that might work, then test the ideas quickly. The Washington site is in Region 2.

Team members are encouraged to take ideas from other states or systems and try them in their own area - testing at least one idea a week. Ideas that produce results will be shared statewide at the monthly Regional Administrators' meetings. Among state goals of the collaborative are to increase the number of Latino homes; keep more siblings together; and increase the overall number of homes by better supporting the foster families.

Ideas tested to date include high level managers calling foster parents and youths at random to ask how things are going and what issues they might have.

Among other ideas on the calendar to be tested are:

- ◆ Developing a "caregivers report" from foster parents to the court to provide a regular avenue for feedback from foster parents to the system. In conjunction with this, training will be developed so foster parents who may be intimidated by writing a report will feel more comfortable doing so.
- ◆ The Regional Administrator and local foster parent recruiters would do a "windshield tour" of areas with significant Hispanic population in the pilot area, driving through an area to identify places that might have been overlooked as possible resources for foster families.

- ◆ A system will be developed for foster parents who have had trouble getting their issues address by routing calls to Area Administrators.
- ◆ Informal meetings will be set up at a McDonalds between foster parents of siblings who have had to be separated so the two families get to know each other.
- ◆ Regional administrators will meet with judges in the near future, seeking their support to require biological families to name three possible kinship placements for their children at the time the children are taken into state custody.

The goal for all these ideas and dozens of others that will be tested is to find and support foster parents with methods that have been shown to work. This hopefully will lead to a greater retention rate and more stability for children. The Casey project requires data measures. Results from all 25 sites are published on the project web site.

### **Placement Stability**

Families for Kids-Recruitment Resources (FFK-RR), a branch of Lutheran Community Services, holds the contract with CA to do statewide recruitment. In addition to the targeted recruitment that has begun this quarter, FFK-RR also has begun a schools-based recruitment effort. Early results of the FFK-RR recruitment activities appear favorable.

- ◆ Work continues on a proposal developed from teams of the FCIP to develop a public/private partnership that would merge the functions of recruitment and retention of foster parents. A work plan is being developed for the kinship project in Region 4. The goal is to divert the children into kinship at the time they are first placed outside their biological homes. The team working on this project also wants to find kinship homes for children who originally were placed in foster care.
- ◆ Families for Kids - Recruitment Resources now is directing the activity of 35 foster parent recruiters. The recruiters were hired under the regional recruitment contract with FFK-RR. The recruiters and the state are working under the Needs Assessment and Recruitment Plans that were developed in each region.
- ◆ The first quarterly newsletter of the FCIP was produced in October. This will be an ongoing way to communicate with foster parents and other stakeholders about the work of the plan.

- ◆ Work was completed on elements of a comprehensive surveying system for foster parents, and pilot testing is being planned. This will replace the current customer survey system, which only focuses on licensing activities.